Sermon of Rev. Bergdoll Sunday At Old Appomattox Court House

(Editor's Note: We are privileged to present below the excellent message delivered at the Second Annual Appomattox County Religious Service at Old Appomattox Court House. The speaker this year was the Rev. Richard A. Bergdoll Minister of the Memorial Methodist Church, Appomattox.)—

PLOWSHARES AND PRUNINGHOOKS

Text: "....they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more." Isaiah 2:4 and Micah 4:3.

Ninety and three years ago, men in uniform all over this nation walked and rode away from similar historic scenes and circumstances as these at Historic Appomattox Court House. Their hands relinquished most willingly and readily swords and spears and returning to their homes throughout the nation, they clasped rejoicingly and heartily plowshares and pruninghooks; thereby setting an indelible example for all succeeding generations. And today throughout the whole world the precious promises of the ancient Hebrew prophets are being constantly and unendingly fulfilled in every nation and upon every continent. Assembled here today on these historic grounds and casting our eyes in all directions, four words of Biblical impact crowd vividly into our minds — Plowshares and Pruninghooks; Swords and Spears. Plowshares and Pruninghooks — implements used in tilling the fields and caring for the orchards and vineyards; and weapons of war and hostility.

We truly thrill to the depths of our being as we read and reread the great prophetic writings of all times, which make so strikingly articulate the immemorial longings of the human heart for universal peace. Seven hundred and fifty years before Christ, Micah, a rural peasant prophet lived in the western part of the Southern Kingdom of Judah near the Philistine border. On the eve of the invasion of the Northern Kingdom of Israel by the Assyrians under Sargon, this man of God prophecied— The time will come when nations shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruninghooks; and nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn of war any more; for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it. About a quarter of a century later, a young aristocratic prophet connected with the Temple worship in Jerusalem - Isaiah, spoke for the Majesty and Mercy of God, as Micah had proclaimed His justice and mercy; and used these same prophetic words of plowshares and pruninghooks, of swords and spears; following the destruction of the Northern Kingdom of Israel by the Assyrians under the leadership of Sennacherib.

As we pursue the prophecies of the Old Testament we discover a very significant statement by Joel who appeared in Jerusalem to help rebuild the Temple following the subjugation of the children of Israel by the Persian Empire. He speaks, the word of the Lord to the little remnant of God's people now living under the tyranny of a foreign nation and to their foreign heathen rulers reversing the language, saying beat your plowshares into swords, and your pruninghooks into spears, the harvest is ripe, the wine press is full, the vats overflow, for wickedness is great in the land. Let us read often and carefully this latter prophetic message of the Old Testament for he continues by reminding his hearers — multitudes, multitudes, in the valley of decision. For the day of the Lord is near in the valley of decision. The sun and the moon are darkened, and the stars withdraw their shining. In the valley of decision— first, last and always. Every generation should feel heavily resting upon them, this necessity of decision. Joel is forcefully reminding each and every generation of the children of God—it must either be plowshares and pruninghooks or swords and spears. It must be either a continuance of wasteful warfare or an unending peaceful pursuit. The world's peoples today are living in the valley of decision.

Politically, half of the world's human beings have changed their political status in the past twelve years. Hundreds of millions have won political freedom, while other countless millions have lost their freedom to Communistic tyranny.

Economically, this very day a handful of men could obliterate mankind by use of bombs now ready for explosion; while at the time with the same skills and techniques that produced these bombs, the world's starvation could be conquered and the diseases of mankind could be healed.

Spiritually, peoples of every nation, race and tribe are seeking new certainties o freligious rootage. Ancient religions, dormant for centuries, are fanning ancient fires that challenge new loyalties. In fifty years Islam has grown from 175 million to 300 million followers. Buddhism has again become a missionary force in our world, and even Hindiism is moving outside its national lines with missions in Afrlca, Europe and America. Today these rival faiths are moving into the heartlands of Christianity. In 40 short years Communism has gained control of one-third of mankind—800,000,000 people, until today its political control reaches from Albania to Alaska and from Lapland to the South Sea Islands of Laos.

We, as followers of the Lord, Christ are being forced to reaffirm our convictions. We must either take the plowshares and pruninghooks and promote peace, prosperity or plenty, OR seize the swords and spears and support wars, waste and ruin. On these historic grounds where long-surviving words—"Let us have peace" were spoken by two of our greatest national leaders—let us here dedicate ourselves to the great task remaining before us, and here highly resolve to lend every ounce of energy of our bodies, minds and souls toward the establishment of peace and goodwill among all peoples of the earth. It is strikingly significant that Micah closes his prophetic utterance with the very thoughtful words—"they shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree, and none shall make them afraid. Every farmer knows that if all you propose to do is to sit under a vine or a fig tree, you will not long have either a vine or a fig tree to sit under. So this truly is one of the most poignant passages in all the Scriptures by prophetic insight the time will come when everyone shall repose peacefully and unafraid—but only because the emphasis has been put upon the constructive implements of peace rather than upon the destructive weapons of war. "Let us have peace"—but it must be more than lip affirmation. Aspirations for peace must be followed by actions for fruitful, harmonious living among all peoples of the whole earth. Something must happen from within the peoples of the earth—rather than things happening without in the realm of militarism, materialism, Humanism. There must be the baptism from above with the mighty power to achieve tranquility.

Cicero said long ago— Peace is liberty in tranquility—a quietness and confidence which comes alone from the author and finisher of freedom, for if the Son shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed.

It is a very striking coincidence that in this same prophecy of Joel where the words —Beat your plowshares into swords and your pruninghooks into spears occur— that we should find the words used by the Apostle Peter on the soul-stirring day of Pentecost for his text—"And it shall come to pass afterwards, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions; and whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved."

So one of the culminating prophecies of the Old Testament was fulfilled; the old dispensation gives way to the new; the old prophetic utterances found expression in new languages and the profound messages of the prophets of the Pre-Christian era were taken up and held forth by the apostles of the New Covenant and of the New Age dominated by the power and presence of the Risen, Living Christ.

Pentecost saw the fulfillment of prophecy of promised peace and reconciliation of many and also witnessed the proclamation of the peace of God which passeth all understanding because our hearts and minds are stayed on the Presence of the Prince of Peace, risen and reigning in all His Power and Authority.

Origen, one of the early Church Fathers of the second Century following the life of Christ, well said —The inspired character of the prophetic writings, and the spirituality of the law of Moses shone out when Jesus came. Clear proofs of the inspiration of the Old Testment could not well be given before the Christ had come. Till then the law and the prophets were open to a suspicion of not being truly divine; it was the coming of Jesus that set them in a plain light as records made by the grace of heaven."

So on this historic occasion we feel the poured-out spirit upon us that we too may become peacemakers using the plowshares and pruning hooks so much needed in our world today rather than employing the swords and spears which make only for continued unrest, wastefulness, destruction, and turmoil.

May I quote one more Old Testament prophet as he speaks a pertinent word of prophecy on this precious promise of world peace for all mankind, and suggest something of the plan of God whereby the Prince of Peace will ultimately reign supreme. listen carefully to the words of Zechariah—associate of Haggai who joins with others following the Days of Captivity to rebuild the destroyed Jerusalem and unwearingly brings hope and fortitude to this ancient remnant of God's People by saying— "Lo, your king comes to you lowly, and ridlng on a colt—He shall cut off the chariot from Ephraim, and the horse from Jerusalem, and the battle bow shall be cut off; He shall command peace unto the nations, His dominion shall be from sea to sea, and from the Great River of Jordon unto the ends of the death." And He shall speak peace unto the nations—and verily, verily just five centuries later Zechariah's vivid portrayal of our Lord's Triumphal Entry in Jerusalem took place and also Isiah's picturesquely prophetic pronouncements lived in the Prince of Peace who was also the Wonderful Counselor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, and of the increase of his government and of peace there shall be no end."

The striking words of this prophecy cause us to pause and ponder, for Zechariah informs us that the Prince of Peace shall speak to command peace upon the nations—and on this historic occasion and in this Year of our Lord nearly twenty centuries since the Prince of Peace proclaimed verbally— My Peace I give unto you—live in your daily conduct and strive to give it to all peoples of the earth. We feel terribly condemned in our souls that within our short span of living on this earth many of us have witnessed at least two and many here have witnessed three and more major wars. We bow in deep contrition before the Prince of Peace this day and in the words of that man of God of another century—St. Francis of Assis — Lord, make me an instrument of Thy peace; where there is hatred, let me sow love; where there is injury, let me plead pardon; where there is doubt, let me express faith; where there is dispair, let me exemplify hope; and where there is darkness, let me light the Light of Life, that soon the whole dark world may become as full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.

Thomas Kempis, German scholar and clergyman of the 15th century, said, "All men desire peace, but few desire the things that make for peace." Milton, English poet of the 17th century, wrote: "Peace has her victories no less renowned than war." The victory that overcomes the world of war and turmoil and unrest is not the continual cry, Peace, peace, where there seems to be no peace, but to face the facts of life with the attitude of the Prince of Peace who told His disciples in the flesh, "Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the Kingdom."

Sen. Lyndon Johnson, Dem., Texas, says, "Whatever the future may hold, we must remember that the road to security does not lie in a field of missiles. It can be found only by walking the path of universal understanding promoted by the God of Peace in whose image every human being has been created.

Sen. Wm. Knowland, Rep., Calif., remarks: There never has been a time when the need for a closer communion with God and increase of our spiritual strength has been more necessary.

Hope of a peaceful world is not through achievement in space travel or satellite developments, but through our reliance on the Creator who made all things and the Prince of Peace who is able to save us unto the uttermost all that come unto Him. Peace is not a manna dropped from heaven. It is something to be earned. It is a by-product of actions, and actions must first take the form of imagination, and faith and hope and aspirations. The more minds in which the ideas and ideals of peace are allowed to germinate, the greater and speedier will be the flowering and the fruitage. Every flower that now covers acres and miles of earth's surface began once as a single seed, 'edd and different to its surroundings' but finally changing its environment with sweetness and beauty. Glory to God in the highest first— when mankind everywhere truly reverences their Creator and Redeemer; and then will follow peace and goodwill among men of earth. Peace cannot be grabbed by the expansion of power, nor secured by the imposition of force. Peace is only attainable when the Spirit of the Prince of Peace reigns supreme in the hearts and souls of mankinl! Which shall it be? Plowshares or Sworls; Pruninghooks or Spears?.....

Highway program bolsters Ethiopian economy.

Diak. 2811 with Personals,

Schooldays, Schooldays!

New Bedford, Mass.- One of the happiest kids in the country is four-years old Gary Pereira. The school board has ruled he cannot enter kindergarten next term because he won't be five before the year ends.

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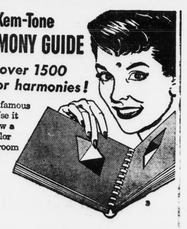

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WHAT TO SEE AT OLD APPOMATTOX COURT HOUSE

McLEAN HOUSE. In the parlor of the home of Wilmer McLean, now restored, Gens. Robert E. Lee and Ulysses S. Grant signed the Peace ending the Civil War, April 9, 1865.

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE MUSEUM. Located in the restored Hix Tavern. Contains orginal flag of truce and many historical relics. Also the famous Guillaume oil painting of Surrender Scene.

OLD COUNTY JAIL. Original brick jail still standing in old court house circle.

RESTORED MEEKS-PLUNKETT HOUSE, PEERS HOUSE, and other historic buildings.

SITE OF THE "APPLE TREE." Where Lee rested awaiting meeting with Grant.

ORIGINAL TREE under which Lee stood to bid farewell to the Army of Northern Virginia.

GRAVESITE OF THE FAMOUS MINSTREL, JOE SWEENEY, just beyond Memorial Bridge over Appomattox River.

CONFEDERATE CEMETARY, site of Lee's headquarters, North Carolina Monument and other historic spots.

Yes, an important decision has to be made nearly every day on the farm. New machinery and equipment, and service maintenance for the many, many items the farmer uses. Appomattox is proud to cater to the need and wishes of the farmer, and the business places listed here are anxious to merit the good will and patronage of our fine farm families. You save time and money by coming to Appomattox.

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Let's be "on the Appomattox team" to make our town tops!

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